

Livestock and Seed Programs
Agriculture Marketing Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Stop 0249, Room 2092-S
Washington, DC 20250-0249

12-05-02

Comments on irradiated meat in school lunches

Dear USDA-

I have been following the issue of food irradiation for the past 20 years. I served for 16 years as the managing director for Consumers United for Food Safety (CUFFS). We examined new food technologies such as food irradiation, bovine growth hormone, genetic engineering, etc. Our main purpose was research, educating consumers, and working for honest labeling in food products so that consumers would have a choice.

Food is the most intimate product that we buy. It becomes apart of our bodies, influences our health and reflects our values about what kind of world we live in.

I am alarmed that the USDA is considering purchasing irradiated meat for the National School Lunch program which is taxpayer subsidized. Labeled irradiated meat has not been successfully sold to adults. Why should we foist it on our children – unlabeled? Although it was approved by the World Health Organization, their approval has been questioned since many of the studies were done by the International Atomic Energy Agency, a promoter of food irradiation.

Our FDA has never done the battery of research suggested by the National Academy of Sciences. There have been no long term human studies on the effects of eating irradiated food. Older animal studies did indeed show adverse health problems including genetic abnormalities, hampered immune systems, organ damage and tumors. Irradiation also causes vitamin loss, both because of the irradiation process and accelerated losses in subsequent cooking.

The European Union is conducting a formal inquiry into the potential hazards of cyclobutanones, a unique product produced by irradiation, and not found in unirradiated foods. The EU presently does not permit irradiated foods (except for spices) to be sold.

Until the many safety questions about irradiation are answered, I strongly opposed allowing irradiated foods in the school lunch program. I also oppose the USDA in effect subsidizing the irradiation industry over other less controversial techniques for sanitizing food such as the Flow high pressure treatment. It's OUR tax dollars and I oppose using public money to subsidize an unsuccessful, controversial industry, which cannot compete in an open, labeled, market. It's bad enough that our meat inspection system allows meat to become feces-contaminated, without irradiating it and selling it unlabeled. I urge you not to purchase irradiated food products for the school lunch program.

Sincerely, 

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